

Statement from SEIU Local 503 on Jackson County Impasse in the Negotiations of a New Collective Bargaining Agreement

The Jackson County Employees Association's bargaining team declared impasse on Tuesday because they felt that after 6 months at the bargaining table, continuing negotiations would not lead to fair wages and an affordable healthcare plan for employees. It is our hope that a deadline for negotiations will lead to a fair settlement that the hard working employees of Jackson County can live with.

County employees earn wages that are 13% to 28% less than comparable employees in other counties. As a result, the county regularly loses talented people to other jobs. That turnover harms the services everyone in Jackson County relies on.

The county's current healthcare plan is the major sticking point in negotiations. The current plan is so expensive that many low wage employees can't afford to use it. Employees have found a deal – the PEBB deal – that would get them a better healthcare plan and save taxpayers money by switching to a larger, statewide healthcare pool operated by the Public Employees Benefits Board (PEBB). The PEBB deal would save taxpayers nearly \$1 million per year and make healthcare more affordable for employees. It's a win/win, but the county won't take the deal.

It's time for Danny Jordan and the county commissioners to listen to their employees and make the fiscally prudent decision to take the PEBB deal.

Declaring impasse kicks off a 30-day cooling off period, during which negotiations can continue. At the end of the cooling off period, management can implement their best and final offer, and employees can choose to go on strike if they don't accept the final offer. We hope that the impending deadline will lead to a resolution at the bargaining table that includes fair wages and affordable healthcare for county employees.

- Melissa Unger, SEIU Local 503